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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 002315

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GH](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES GHANA

¶1. (C) Summary: During a November 2 courtesy call, outgoing Palestinian Ambassador and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps Ibrahim Omar told the Ambassador that U.S. government efforts to gain allies among West African Muslims and stabilize the region will only succeed if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is settled. He also offered a critical evaluation of former President Rawlings and discussed regional conflicts. End Summary.

STATE OF GHANA'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY

¶2. (U) Omar told the Ambassador that Muslims are increasingly integrated into political life in Ghana, noting that several Muslims have been elected Members of Parliament and that President John Kufuor selected Aliu Mahama, a northern Muslim, as vice president to promote national unity. Omar warned, however, that too few northern Muslims are finding employment upon their arrival in the coastal cities. Omar said the "zongos" (poor Muslim ghettos) where these migrants settle could become breeding grounds for radicalism.

¶3. (U) On two occasions, Omar praised Yasir Arafat as a man of peace who could have ignited worldwide conflict but chose not to. Omar said Arafat could have called on Muslims to defend their holy sites in Jerusalem, and that even Christians may have heeded such a call if Arafat had turned his back completely on the possibility of a peaceful resolution. He argued passionately that Muslim communities in West Africa will remain vulnerable to radicalism as long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict endures because Muslims regard defending Islam as a moral responsibility.

¶4. (U) Omar applauded the U.S. Embassy's Muslim outreach efforts, which he said helps him to persuade Muslims that the U.S. is fighting terrorism rather than Islam and to counter the radicalism spread by Iran, Libya and other sources of funding for development projects in the Muslim community. He advocated that the U.S. government dedicate outreach and development projects to Muslim communities in northern Ghana where the needs are greatest.

DESTRUCTIVE ROLE OF RAWLINGS

¶5. (C) Omar said that despite his close friendship with Rawlings during the ex-president's two decades in power, he sees him as a destructive influence on Ghana's emerging democracy and on the opposition New Democratic Congress (NDC) party. Omar portrayed both Rawlings and his wife Nana as out-of-touch and having an insatiable appetite for power. Omar said Rawlings cannot endure psychologically having lost the reins of power and should have sought a post-presidential identity earlier. "He feels defeated," Omar said, adding that if it were not for Rawlings' advisor, Captain Kojo Tsikata, Rawlings never would have stepped down.

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¶6. (C) Omar said nearly every remark by Rawlings becomes an embarrassment to his party because he relies on virtually no advisor except his wife whose own power hunger has cost Rawlings support among the NDC. According to Omar, Rawlings remains dangerous to Ghana's democracy not only because of his ill-considered threats of staging a coup d'etat but also because the Israelis provided Rawlings with stockpiles of arms throughout the country. He said these stockpiles are not limited to the heavily ethnic Ewe Volta Region as rumored (Rawlings is half-Ewe, half-Scottish.)

¶7. (C) In spite of these threats to Ghana's young democracy, Omar predicted that if the country could survive two more national elections, a full generation of Ghanaians would have only known democratic rule and would not tolerate another coup d'etat.

REGIONAL ISSUES

¶8. (U) Omar said he considered both Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia potentially explosive and destabilizing for the West

African sub-region. He said he knew President Laurent Gbagbo personally and appreciated the difficulty of his circumstances but emphasized that the present situation is "very dangerous" and "must be settled."

¶ 9. (U) Omar acknowledged the difficulty of restoring democratic rule to Liberia. He commented that the U.S. could not afford to abandon a region with 26 percent of the world's oil supply to British and French companies. In turn, the Ambassador pointed out the large proportion of Americans with historical ties to West Africa and said U.S. interests were not limited to the region's oil.

¶ 10. (U) Omar said former Togolese leader Gnassingbe Eyadema was a friend and that he had been to Lome to meet his son, Faure Gnassingbe. However, he did not offer any substantive commentary on the present government.

¶ 11. (C) Comment: Omar, who has had responsibilities in Ghana since 1986, was open with both personal and political commentary and eagerly shared his insights on regional issues and domestic politics. He claimed that he was being especially frank and less diplomatic with his remarks because of his imminent departure. He suggested multiple times that his remarks were drawn directly from his diplomatic reporting. Post has no information to corroborate his allegation about Rawlings' stockpiling of Israeli arms, and we find it difficult to believe.

¶ 12. (SBU) Bio note: Omar is a gracious host who enjoys introducing his guests to Palestinian herbal tea and sweets. Having spent nearly half his adult life in Ghana, he was in a reflective mood. He said all his friends and his entire social life revolved around Ghanaians. He said that years ago he suffered burns on his forehead and scalp when he rescued his young son during an accidental fire at his diplomatic residence. He mentioned that he had been offered a position with sub-regional responsibilities based in Lagos, but he hoped to secure an assignment in the U.S. He said the Israelis would have to approve him for such a post. He pointed out that he had persuaded his daughter and son-in-law, a prominent optometrist who had studied in the U.K. for six years, to relocate to Accra. Omar said that his son also had previously taught at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). According to Omar, these family ties are sure to bring him back to Ghana, especially if he is posted to Lagos.

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